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SUBJECT: CHP CONTROL OF EDIRNE THREATENED IN MAYORAL  
REMATCH

1 (U) Incumbent Edirne Mayor Hamdi Sedefci of the Republican People's Party (CHP) faces a tough rematch at the polls on March 29 from Justice and Development Party (AKP) candidate Mustafa Hatipler. Sedefci barely defeated Hatipler in the 2004 local contest; winning by less than 1,000 votes out of 82,000 cast. A close contest in the last election, combined with a four month stint in jail in 2008 on corruption charges, threatens to make this rematch an even tougher race for the incumbent Sedefci.

12. (SBU) Sedefci told us the 2004 campaign was more challenging because he lacked a sizable staff in the previous election as he did not run as an incumbent. He claimed his proven track record of providing services to the city will help him to victory, predicting a strong turnout for CHP. He explained that his election strategy in the last two months has included reaching out to nearly 5,000 more "trustworthy" women and children through tea party meetings. Sedefci assured us the corruption charges against him were baseless, driven by a vengeful police chief. Sedefci contended the baseless charges came only four months after he had been jailed. He cited human rights concerns for having been jailed without charge, claiming the police arrested him first and then searched for evidence. He declined to provide his thoughts on the Ergenekon indictment, noting that the room was bugged. He has been out of jail for about nine months, but he told us his next court appearance will be on April 10 after the election.

13. (SBU) In contrast, our meeting with AKP candidate Hatipler centered on policy issues, such as improving Edirne's infrastructure and creating more opportunities for college bound students. Hatipler contended Sedefci's greatest challenge will be overcoming his failure to attract investment to the city, especially in light of the economic crisis.

14. (SBU) Edirne -- a former capital of the Ottoman Empire -- is literally at the crossroads to the European Union, bordering both Greece and Bulgaria. Edirne's 130,000 residents resemble the diversity of the region, home to a synagogue until 1970 and two Bulgarian churches. Also the Roma compose 30 percent of Edirne's population, according to Deputy Governor Aydin Akkor. Edirne's electorate has historically alternated between electing CHP or center-right Motherland Party (ANAP) mayors over the past six elections. In the 2007 general election AKP did relatively poorly in Edirne; receiving only 21 percent of the vote, compared to 47 percent nationwide.

15. (SBU) Comment: With polling data unavailable, it is

unclear whether the corruption charges against Sedefci will make the difference this time around. Both pro-government and opposition media have portrayed Sedefci as the culprit, yet Sedefci's self portrayal as the victim of a political witch hunt might resonate with voters. If Hatipler does prevail on March 29, then AKP would have a powerful symbolic victory in this historic and diverse city.

Wiener